

House Rules Committee Chairwoman Louise Slaughter and 17 other members of Congress this week asked the Obama Administration to close the troubled BP Atlantis oil platform, which is floating 190 miles south of New Orleans.

Slaughter's letter to the Department of the Interior says that the agency should accelerate their investigation into allegations of unsafe operations at BP's Atlantis deepwater drilling platform, which have been documented in various reports – including a CBS News piece.

"If there is even a small chance that the Atlantis is a 'ticking time bomb' as some have called it, the pace at which the Department has worked to resolve the questions raised about the Atlantis' safety is worrisome," wrote Slaughter and her colleagues.

In a letter addressed to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation, and Enforcement (BOEMRE) Director Michael Bromwich, the House members urged the Department of Interior to immediately halt operations at the Atlantis platform pending preliminary investigations into worrying claims from a BP whistleblower.

Former BP contractor Ken Abbott, a whistleblower from BP's Atlantis rig, has alleged that BP's rig operators lack up-to-date and critical engineering documentation essential to averting disaster in the case of rig malfunction.

In addition to calling for at least a temporary stop to operations at the Atlantis, the letter called on BOEMRE to conduct a formal interview of Mr. Abbott as part of their investigation and, most importantly, to immediately check the adequacy of the engineering documents on the Atlantis.

[The letter](#), copied below, was signed by the following House members: Reps. Louise Slaughter (NY), Earl Blumenauer (OR), Donna Christensen (VI), Ted Deutch (FL), John Garamendi (CA), Al Green (TX), Alcee Hastings (FL), Maurice Hinchey (NY), Mazie Hirono (HI), Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX), Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX), Barbara Lee (CA), John Lewis (GA), Doris Matsui (CA), James Moran (VA), Jackie Speier (CA), Lynn Woolsey (CA) and David Wu (OR).

On May 16, 60 Minutes aired [a story regarding Ken Abbott's Atlantis rig warning](#).

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Michael Bromwich
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 100
Washington, DC 20240

Secretary Salazar and Director Bromwich:

As we continue to deal with the catastrophe caused by the massive failure of the BP Deepwater Horizon, I write to request that the Department of the Interior and BOEMRE take immediate action to prevent what could be an even more serious disaster at the site of the BP Atlantis.

You are no doubt aware of the allegations made by former BP contractor Ken Abbott, who has testified that BP knowingly operated its Atlantis platform without following standard engineering practices that require "as-built" process and instrument diagrams be in the hands of the operators of the rig. Without these documents, operators would likely be unable to quickly and safely deal with a malfunction on the Atlantis of the sort that occurred on the Deepwater Horizon; they literally would not know what buttons to push or what parts of the rig are connected to what other parts.

Mr. Abbott has said that this sort of lack of critical engineering documentation appears to be a "common thread" between the Texas City disaster in 2005, the Alaska pipeline spills in 2006, and the ongoing Deepwater Horizon catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico. In each of these incidents, media reports indicate that inadequacy of engineering documentation played a part in creating or worsening the problem.

If there is even a small chance that the Atlantis is a "ticking time bomb" as some have called it,

the pace at which the Department has worked to resolve the questions raised about the Atlantis' safety is worrisome.

I urge the Department and BOEMRE to take several steps to resolve this issue: first, to immediately order a halt to operations at the Atlantis pending at least a preliminary investigation into the truth of Mr. Abbot's claims. Second, to immediately conduct a formal interview of Mr. Abbott as part of BOEMRE's investigation into the safety of the Atlantis. Third, to conduct a "spot check" of the adequacy of the engineering documents on board the Atlantis. Mr. Abbott's testimony in front of the Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals of the House Committee on Natural Resources leads me to believe that such a check would either confirm his allegations or provide some level of confidence in BP's claim that everything is in order.

I am concerned that BOEMRE and the Department are content to let the Atlantis continue to operate without at least taking these quick steps to ascertain the truth of the allegations raised by a whistleblower. A long, thorough investigation is certainly called for, but in the meantime these immediate steps are absolutely necessary in order to assure that the Atlantis does not turn into an even larger disaster than the Deepwater Horizon.